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Heritage language preservation among migrant children in Poznań and Wrocław: The emic and etic perspective

ABSTRACT. Children in migrant families are often torn between maintaining their heritage language and acquiring fluency in the language of the country where they reside. Knowledge of the majority language helps them succeed in school and find meaningful employment, while the ability to speak the heritage language facilitates communication within their families. However, acquiring competencies in both languages is not always easy. It is especially complicated in multigenerational families, and families where the parents speak different heritage languages. In schools, the dynamics differ depending on the number of speakers of particular heritage languages. In this paper, we analyse the dynamics within families and schools of children with at least one foreign-born parent. We ask who is responsible for the children's facility with either or both languages and analyse ways of integration and exclusion of migrant children vis-à-vis the language/s they choose to speak. We explore these questions within grounded theory to identify emic and etic attitudes towards majority / minority languages. The empirical data come from ethnographic research with migrant children and their families, teachers, and teachers' intercultural assistants conducted in Poznań and Wrocław.

KEYWORDS: international migration, migrant children, heritage language, heritage language learners, integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children in migrant families are often torn between maintaining the language/s they speak at home and acquiring fluency in the language of the country where they reside. Knowledge of the majority language helps them succeed in school and find meaningful employment later in life. Many policymakers and researchers see fluency in the language of the immigrants' adopted country as a mark of belonging and integration (Esser 2006).

However, the importance of heritage language/s cannot be underestimated either. Knowing their (or their parents') native / heritage language[1] facilitates children's communication within the nuclear family and beyond. Additionally, children who have an opportunity to maintain their heritage language while growing up, become bilingual and biliterate. Research shows that these abilities may positively affect their cognitive, intellectual, and identity development (Lee & Gupta 2020).

Acquiring competencies in both languages is not always easy. It is especially complicated in multigenerational families and families where parents speak different native and / or heritage languages. In this paper, we look at children with migration background in families with at least one foreign-born parent residing in the Polish cities of Poznań and Wrocław. We analyse the dynamics within families and schools at the intersection of "majority" and "minority" language learning and usage. We ask who is responsible for the children's facility with either or both languages and analyse ways of inclusion and exclusion of migrant children based on the language/s they choose to speak in different contexts.

We begin our paper with a brief review of existing research and the theoretical framework within which we situate our study. An overview of the study along with some remarks on our own positionality vis-à-vis the protagonists of this article follows. The main part of our article presents the results of our empirical research organized along the main themes stemming from ethnographic interviews and participant observation. In conclusions, we provide some comments for teachers and service providers working with children from migrant families.

2. EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Heritage languages have been of interest to scholars and activists since the 1970s, when "they received recognition from the political and educational spheres in the United States and Canada" (Moreno-Fernández & Loureda Lamas 2023: 1). Heritage language acquisition and maintenance are an important aspect of migration studies. Given the number of Latinx immigrants in the United States, Spanish language has been of the most interest since the earliest stages of the heritage language studies (Evans 1989), but other languages have also garnered attention, including Chinese (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe 2009) and Korean (Lee

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[1] Our interlocutors did not use the term "język odziedziczony" (heritage language); it is a term used mainly by scholars to describe a language passed down through generations, focusing on its role in cultural heritage preservation and linguistic study. Instead, they used the terms "język ojczysty", "рідна мова" or "mother tongue," depending which language we spoke to emphasize a sense of identity and belonging.

& Gupta 2020). Scholars also analysed heritage language maintenance and loss among Eastern European children residing in the United States (Nesteruk 2010).

A list of themes at the nexus of heritage language acquisition / maintenance and migration is long and includes among others: negative effects of heritage language attrition and eventual loss of heritage language leading to identity crisis (Law 2015); migrant children's relationships with their families and communities, including rejection of children who do not speak their heritage language from the ethnic community (Budiyana 2017); social values assigned to particular languages (Sánchez-Muñoz 2016); heritage language schools (Cho 2000; Lu 2001); role of home in the heritage language teaching (DeCapua & Wintergerst 2009; Lee & Wright 2014); parents' attitudes towards heritage language learning (Lee 2013; Park & Sarkar 2007); and practices to maintain heritage language (Kang 2013; Kim 2011). These topics have been investigated within diverse disciplines. Space limitation does not allow us to discuss all of them, but we want to mention the comprehensive review of sociolinguistic literature on heritage language learners undertaken by Jennifer Leeman and Rachel Showstack (2022). In the context of our research, their discussion of sociolinguistics in educational contexts and practical recommendations for educators working with heritage language learners is of most value.

The European Union "is generally pictured as valuing multilingualism, as reflected by EU policies and citizens' attitudes. However, when Europeans think and speak about protecting multilingualism, they do not necessarily have migrant languages in mind" (Kupisch 2021: 46). This does not mean that literature on heritage language and migration is absent in Europe, it is just not as plentiful as in the United States. Scholars have tested whether the hermeneutic models generated and applied to the study of heritage language in North America apply to the European context (Di Salvo 2016); assessed the demographic and linguistic situation of Spanish as a heritage language in Europe (Loureda Lamas et al. 2023); and analysed regional minority languages and immigrant minority languages in relation to educational policies (De Bot & Gorter 2005).

In Poland, the interest in heritage languages is predominantly confined to maintenance of the Polish language by members of various Polish diasporas or maintenance of heritage languages among national and ethnic minorities. Notable exceptions are articles about education and integration of children of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland (Nguyen & Phan 2016) and challenges Polish educators face while teaching Vietnamese children (Sznajder 2016). Polish scholars have written about Polish language as a heritage language in diasporic communities in Australia (Romanowski 2021; Dębski 2009), Chicago, Paris, and Vienna (Seretny & Lipińska 2016; Seretny 2011; Lipińska 2014). The scholarship of Anna Seretny and Ewa Lipińska closely allies with our interests as they

studied teaching Polish as a foreign language to members of a variety of Polish diasporic communities.

Ilona Banasiak and Magdalena Olpińska-Szkiełko (2021) discuss heritage language maintenance and second language acquisition in the context of bilingualism, thus adding yet another dimension to the study of heritage languages. Their empirical material comes from Polish diasporic communities in New Zealand. Ilona Matysiak (2014) explored the stigma attached to a minority status of Belarussians and Ukrainians in Poland before and after 1989. The Polish Constitution guarantees national and ethnic minorities the freedom to cultivate their own identity and cultural heritage, including language. Matysiak showed how historical stigmatization has affected different generations and often had polar opposite results: stigma or "added value." The latter is quite visible today, when thousands of Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion seek refuge in Poland, and Ukrainian speakers are in high demand in schools and assistance programs.

There is virtually no research on heritage language learners in the immigrant communities in Poland. Some authors mention in passing the effects of adhering to one's native language on children's ability to integrate in Polish schools (e.g., Baranowska 2020), but most authors focus on learning Polish. Paulina Stasiowska (2022) reflects on Polish language acquisition among immigrant children using her experiences as a teacher of Polish as a foreign language. Pavlo Levchuk (2018) analyses trilingualism among adult Ukrainians living in Poland. Małgorzata Pamuła-Behrens (2018) discusses the relationship between teaching Polish as a language of school education and teaching Polish as a foreign language. Given the growing immigration to Poland and an increased number of children with migration background in Polish schools, with this paper we aim to stimulate scientific inquiry into the majority / minority language studies and debates.

3. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article is part of a larger study entitled "Good beginnings, promising futures. Children with migration background in Polish schools" examining integration of migrant children in schools in Poznań and Wrocław and by extension in the larger Polish society. This examination is undertaken from the *emic* (or insiders') perspective of different actors: the children, their parents, their educators, and child activists. In this article, we look at the interplay of majority and minority languages and the ways they facilitate or impede migrant children and adolescents' belonging in the classroom and beyond.

3.1. Grounded theory

Many different theories can be used to discuss language learning, be it native, heritage or second language. As anthropologists, we are not interested in the purely linguistic theories that are concerned primarily with an "ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance" (Chomsky 1965: 3). This approach to the study of languages has largely excluded bilingual and multilingual speakers from the linguists' purview although in the early 1980s formal work considering bilingual grammars started to emerge (e.g., Hyams et al. 2015; Slabakova 2016). Our reading of this literature indicates that linguists have continued to focus on the "multilingual mind" and the "possible grammars" (Lohndal et al. 2019), not the socio-cultural context of language learning.

As anthropologists, we are less interested in the deep and surface structures of language learning Noam Chomsky wrote about, but rather how learning and / or maintaining the majority / minority languages affect immigrant children's belonging and membership in the host society and their own ethnic community as well as the different contexts in which majority / minority languages are used. The ethnographic interviews and analysis employed in this study were informed by grounded ethnography (Babchuk & Hitchcock 2013), which builds on the classic grounded theory developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965) and constructivist grounded theory, proposed by Kathy Charmaz (2006).

Grounded theory, understood as the discovery of emerging patterns in the collected empirical data (Glaser 1978; Glaser & Strauss 2017), is a systematic qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the generation of theory rooted in data (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) assumes a relativist approach, acknowledges multiple standpoints and realities, and takes a reflexive stance towards actions, situations, and participants. Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges that qualitative interviewing can provide an in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience and can elicit views of the person's subjective world (Charmaz 2003).

Grounded theory and ethnography are highly compatible. Part of this compatibility derives from the similarities of the two methods. As a naturalistic form of inquiry, ethnography entails observing and analysing behaviour in natural settings (Belk et al. 1988; Longabaugh 1980) resulting in thick de-

scription (Geertz 1973). Grounded theory similarly performs best with data generated in natural settings (Robrecht 1995). Both have been derived from the symbolic interactionist perspective (Goulding 1998), and both often rely on participant observations. Sample selection is emergent in both ethnography and grounded theory (Belk et al. 1988), and both attempt to obtain emic descriptions of behaviour (Barnes 1996).

3.2. The sample and data sources

The data that informs our analysis comes from in-depth ethnographic interviews with migrant children, their parents, teachers, psychologists and focus group discussions with intercultural assistants in Poznań and Wrocław as well as participant observation at schools, extracurricular programs, and sometimes in the children's homes.

The protagonists of this article include both girls and boys ranging in age between 10 and 18. They hail from Afghanistan, Belarus, Brazil, Moldova, Nigeria, the UK, Ukraine, the United States, and Vietnam. All of the interviewees are currently living in western Poland. Some attend public schools where Polish is the language of instruction and some attend private schools, where the language of instruction is either Polish or English. Ukrainian migrant children represent the largest proportion of foreign-born children in public schools in Poland. Most of them are learning in brick-and-mortar Polish schools, or are simultaneously attending both a Polish school and an online Ukrainian one. Some students are solely attending online or on-site Ukrainian schools recently set up on the Polish territory.

Many of our young interlocutors come from bilingual or multilingual families. Several of the Ukrainian children in our sample have parents of Ukrainian ethnicity, but with different primary languages: Russian or Ukrainian. Often, these children were educated in the Ukrainian language but spoke Russian at home. Our sample also includes families with two foreign-born parents (sometimes coming from the same country but sometimes from two different countries and linguistic groups) and families with one Polish and one foreign-born parent or families with two Polish parents that lived abroad for a number of years and returned to Poland. Their children were either born abroad or in Poland, but spent parts of their childhood (and education) abroad.

The data was collected by the authors and their young co-researchers, i.e., teen students who elicited information from their peers both inside and outside schools, following the established informed consent-based procedures. In total, we interviewed 37 children, 17 parents, eight intercultural assistants, 10 school

principals, three teachers, four education experts, and two psychologists. We conducted interviews in Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and English, and on occasion in other languages, using trained interpreters. Interviews lasted from one to three hours. In some cases, we interviewed the children more than once. All interviews were voice-recorded, transcribed, and translated into Polish or English as needed. Informal conversations were shorter and were recorded as field notes. We used pseudonyms[2] and, in some cases, different locations to ensure anonymity. The field research was conducted between February and November 2023.

3.3. Positionality

Much has been written about reflexivity (Berger 2013) and positionality (Bourke 2014) of the researcher/s conducting qualitative studies. After all, research is shaped by both researcher/s and study participant/s (England 1994). In positionality theory, it is acknowledged that because we have multiple overlapping identities, we make meaning from various aspects of those identities (Kezar 2002).

Many things set us apart from our interviewees, but we had one very important characteristic in common. Both authors are immigrants, from Ukraine to Poland, and from Poland to the United States, respectively. Liisa Malkki warned about the risks of "posit[ing] a single, essential, transhistorical refugee condition" (Malkki 1995: 511). We, along with other scholars, acknowledge that refugeeness (and the state of being an immigrant) is always a highly context-dependent reality (Chossière 2021). Nevertheless, we posit that the experience of being a refugee or a migrant brings people together and allows for a more meaningful engagement between migrant scholars and the migrants they study. Linguistic similarities or the common struggle with the majority language also binds together migrant researchers and their study participants.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Whose heritage language?

There is a consensus in literature regarding what constitutes "majority language." In most studies, the majority / dominant language is considered either

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[2] In anthropology, when quoting interlocutors, we assign them unique pseudonyms instead of using codes. To protect the sensitive migrant group, we avoid providing detailed notes regarding their place of origin. After each pseudonym, we include a number indicating the interlocutors age (e.g. Lina/14).

the official language of the country and / or the language spoken by the statistical majority of residents. Things get complicated when a country has more than one official language or introduces new language policies. In the educational context, the emphasis is on the language of instruction in the majority of schools. In Poland, all public schools provide instruction in Polish. Of course, there are specialized schools where instruction is provided in other languages. There are private schools, both Polish and international, where instruction is rendered solely or predominantly in English. There are also Ukrainian schools where students are taught in Ukrainian, but in Poland neither English nor Ukrainian are considered "majority languages."

There are many definitions of "heritage language" and "heritage language learners." In Canada and the United States, countries with long history of immigration, heritage language is defined as any immigrant language spoken by immigrants and their children (Montrul 2020), while in Australia it refers to "community language" (Clyne & Fernandez 2008), a term used in Australia since 1975 to denote languages other than English and Aboriginal languages. In some countries, "heritage language" is called a "minority language."

The term "heritage language learner" has been and continues to be a much-debated issue. The term first appeared in the ACTFL Standards of Foreign Language Teaching (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages 1996). In the United States, the term refers to a "wide variety of individuals" (Potowski 2014). Writing about Korean-American children who are raised to speak their heritage language in the United States, Lee and Gupta (2020) define "heritage language learners" as children who "have Korean heritage and speak Korean with at least one of the parents regardless of their proficiency in Korean" (Lee & Gupta 2020: 521).

There have been some disagreements regarding the accepted but broad definition. Guadalupe Valdés (2000) originally described the heritage language learner as an individual who "is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken. The student may speak or merely understand the heritage language and be, to some degree, bilingual in English and the heritage language" (Valdés 2000: 1). Kim Potowski (2014) critiqued this definition as too "narrow." According to her, it excludes a growing group of language students in the United States who may have been raised with a "strong cultural connection to a particular ethnolinguistic group and have a 'heritage motivation,' but who do not speak or understand the language at all" (Potowski 2014: 405). Valdés' definition also excludes a third type of student: someone who arrived from a Spanish-speaking country after the age of 12, and who has often developed proficiency in Spanish but who no longer uses the language. Potowski considers these students as "native" or "homeland" Spanish speakers.

The definitions discussed above do not account for children who grow up in families where multiple "heritage languages" are spoken. In our sample, we have children whose parents come from two different countries and speak two different "native languages" or come from the same country, have the same nationality, but speak different languages.

Two brothers growing up in the United States with their Filipino father and Polish mother wondered whose "heritage" they should adhere to. They looked at each other and Tom said: "Our heritage language is English" (Tom/12). Although born in the Philippines, their father said with a smile "I am as American as an apple pie and English is *my* language" (Erwing/40). He speaks Tagalog when he visits his family in Manila. However, he does not "have a feel for it."

4.2. The emic (or insider's) perspective

In our research, we use *emic* categories (Pike 2015) and try to avoid the dichotomy majority / minority language as it might be perceived as judgmental. During interviews, we did not introduce or mention this distinction. Emic categories highlight the agency of the interviewed children. Our interlocutors, both children and their parents, used a variety of phrases describing the language/s they speak, often indicating where they speak a particular language and with whom.

4.2.1. "Our language"

Two teenage sisters from Ukraine (Iza/14; Irin/18) speak Russian with their father and Ukrainian with their mother. They speak Polish at school and English on "Friday, an English Day." Their mother, although Ukrainian by ethnicity, was born and spent part of her childhood in Africa. English was her first-learnt language. She said: "We are a multilingual family, speaking Ukrainian, Russian, English, and for the last five years Polish." She has instituted a "family language policy." She said: "As a mother, who builds a family nest and is responsible for comfort of the family, I insisted that we speak Ukrainian at the dinner table, and the rest of the time we are free to use whatever language is needed" (Anna/42).

Polish parents, even when married to a partner with a different native language, used the term "język ojczysty," literally "the language of the fatherland." They were especially prone to using this term while emphasizing how important it is for children to speak their native language. It did not seem as important to them that the children speak the language of the other parent. Non-Polish parents

simply named the language/s they knew when talking about the languages they spoke or taught their children.

Children, especially those living in households where more than one language was spoken, provided more descriptive narratives. At least in one family, three siblings indicated that they have their own language "mamy nasz język" which combines both Polish and English (their dad is an English speaker): "We speak our own language. Often, we start a sentence in one language but continue it in another or we intersperse Polish words into English conversations and English words into Polish conversations" (Adam/14). Their mom also pointed out that her husband, who does not really speak Polish would include the few Polish words he does know into his speech, especially terms of endearment.

Our respondents used the term "our language" also in reference to dialects or regional languages they spoke. Lina, a 14-years-old girl, comes from the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. Lina's father had experience working in Poland and the family planned to move to Poland after her graduation from school. Their native languages are Ukrainian and the Transcarpathian dialect, but keeping their migration plans in mind, they started to learn Polish before they came to Poland. Lina goes to Polish school and continues to learn Polish, but she is still fond of the Ukrainian language and the classical Ukrainian literature. She said:

> When I am reading their [Polish] literature, it is kind of boring. There is no action there. But in Ukrainian literature everything is beautifully described, and the language itself both sounds and reads beautifully. I really like Ukrainian language. Our language [Ukrainian] is great, it's a nightingale language [ukr. pronunciation *solov`ina*], there is no imperfection there. Sometimes when my friends hear me speaking Ukrainian, they say: "Hey, stop talking like that, speak 'our language' [Transcarpathian dialect], but I am resting inside of my soul, when I speak or read Ukrainian" (Lina/14).

"Our language" was also used in the context of intergenerational discussions and social media. The young interlocutors indicated that age differences between teachers and students affect the sense of belonging to the school community or to a particular group: "The language is fluid and constantly changing", each generation has its own "set of remarkable words."

Mari, is a 16-years-old influencer. She has her own Instagram page dedicated to photography. She found a lot of support from her teachers, first, with learning Polish, but later also with growing professionally.

> There were a few teachers in my school who helped me running my Instagram page. When I came to Poland, I already had my own Insta page, because I love photography. When my teachers found out that I had an Instagram page, they helped me create captions in Polish. Moreover, they sent me to several photography and design

competitions. Becoming a part of the school [community] was easy, because we have a young team of teachers who help with digital development projects. I think the teachers' age is important because it helps them better understand our interests. With younger teachers we have "our language" we use to speak about our common interests in cyberspace (Mari/16).

Surprisingly, in some situations, Polish became "our (secret) language." One of our interlocutors, 16-year-old Anton, who is currently living in Wrocław, said that when he went on a trip abroad with his friends, while walking through the streets of Berlin, they started to speak Polish because it seemed "that everyone around them was speaking Ukrainian or Russian." In this situation, Polish became a kind of "protection against eavesdropping." Anton said:

I am from the Eastern part of Ukraine, and I have spoken Russian all my life. But then it happened that because of the war we had to not only flee to another region, but to another country, and change our language. Hmm, we had to change it twice: first, from Russian to Ukrainian [in 2014] and then to Polish [in 2022]. Being abroad, when we went for a walk, we first spoke Ukrainian to each other, but when there were a lot of people around us, we used Polish as *our secret language* so no one would overhear us (Anton/16).

4.2.2. Maintaining and learning heritage language/s

While Polish, the official language in Poland spoken by the majority of the population, is learned at schools and extracurricular programs, the maintenance and learning of heritage languages is confined to the family. At the moment, most students in primary schools learn foreign languages. In first grade, they choose one foreign language but in seventh grade they add a second foreign language. Even though the curriculum includes a "modern foreign language," in most cases children can choose one of the European languages: English, German, French, Spanish, and sometimes Russian. The choice of foreign languages is often limited due to availability of teachers (Figarski 2008).

In countries with a long history of immigration, ethnic communities provide many opportunities to continue studying heritage languages. The immigrant communities in Poland are not that well organized yet or not large enough to support heritage language schools. The Ukrainian community is an exception; there are Ukrainian schools both in Poznań and Wrocław, but they provide a full curriculum to their students, not just heritage language instruction. Additionally, there are over 100 centers serving the Ukrainian minority in Poland in regions where the number of potential students is small (Romaniuk & Jakubowska-Krawczyk 2022).

In the absence of heritage language classes, parents take responsibility for making sure that children maintain their heritage language/s. One of the families that had made a permanent home in the United States, came to Poland with the sole purpose for the boys to improve their Polish. The Polish mother said: "You cannot call yourself a Pole if you don't speak Polish. We came to live in Poland for a couple of years so my sons can get in touch with their Polish heritage and identity" (Izabela/38). She totally ignored the fact that her husband is not Polish and seemed surprised when we asked whether the boys will be learning Tagalog.

In a family with a Brazilian mother and a Polish father, the parents embraced, "right from the belly," a rule to communicate with the children in their respective native languages. This choice was grounded in the understanding that infants, from the very outset, "do not distinguish languages, but they are attuned to recognize whether it is mom or dad speaking." They also observed that later on their daughters began to distinguish these two languages (Marcia/40). Growing up in Poland the girls "switch from one language to another without any problems." The father noted that the girls "have better vocabulary in Polish, but their abstract thinking and communication were notably better in Portuguese" (Jan/42).

Miki, an 18-years-old boy from the Sumy region of Ukraine, spoke mainly *Surzhyk*, a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian (Gasparov 2006) spoken without following grammatical rules of the literary language/s (Romaniuk & Jakubowska-Krawczyk 2022). Miki has lived in Poland since March 2022 and learnt some Polish, but he claims that he "feels relaxed and secure" when someone addresses him in Ukrainian. He said:

> I speak Surzhyk. And on one hand, I'm fine with that. The only ones in our family who speak pure and clear Ukrainian are grandma and grandpa. When we talk on the phone, I often think: "How nice it sounds!" I have a problem expressing myself in literary Ukrainian, especially when I need to write an official letter, it gets difficult. Who would have thought that there would be a time when I will learn pure Ukrainian from my grandparents?! (Miki/18)

Language is often considered an important attribute of identity and cultural heritage, although in some cases "cultural and linguistic ties" may be also used as a "cultural weapon" (Yao et al. 2023) understood as the intentional political manipulation, magnifying societal division. Currently in Ukraine, there is a public debate regarding "streamlining the mother tongue" and speaking solely Ukrainian. The debate has intensified since the Russian invasion of the country. This situation also affects families living abroad and requires replacing one heritage language with another (Seals & Beliaeva 2023). This switch under the

Ukrainization policy is not without its problems. A psychologist we interviewed who works with Ukrainian youth from Russian speaking families was quite concerned what the rather forceful emphasis on speaking solely Ukrainian might do to the adolescents dealing with identity issues.

4.3. The etic (or outsiders') perspective

While a couple of non-Polish parents stressed the importance of knowing Polish and encouraged their children to speak Polish at home, teaching the majority language is, by and large, the sole responsibility of schools. Although not particularly well trained in teaching Polish as a foreign language, teachers and intercultural assistants try their best to make learning Polish a pleasant experience. Children appreciate their efforts. Kira, a 14-years-old Ukrainian girl, liked her Polish classes, because her teacher explained the "hidden meaning of some main characters' attitudes, cultural codes or behaviours" in the compulsory school readings (*lektura*). It helped Kira to expand her Polish vocabulary as well as overcome a language barrier. Kira was "afraid to speak out loud in Polish" because "some words sound so similar, but have different meaning" (Kira/14). Her teacher's positive attitude provided a springboard – "a short bridge" (Gallegos et al. 2023) – for Kira's increased participation in the school community.

Many children with whom we spoke expressed a desire for their heritage language/s to be appreciated by their teachers and classmates. We have encountered only two teachers who spoke fluent Russian or Ukrainian. Although not explicitly forbidden, speaking heritage languages during recess or school excursions is discouraged. We have heard of a teacher gently encouraging her students to speak solely Polish when at school in order to get as much practice as they could. But we also encountered a principal who sternly admonished students by saying: "This is Poland and we speak Polish in this country!" (Joanna/50).

Eliza wished for her classmates to show interest in her native Belorussian, but "no one ever did" (Eliza/15). Igor, an 11-year-old Belorussian boy, said his teacher was only interested in his fluency in Russian when she needed him to explain something to a newly arrived Ukrainian student. Igor was proud to be able to help, but in the end resented being treated so instrumentally. He said: "The teacher is not interested in *me*; she only wants my language when it suits *her*" [emphasis in the original quotation] (Igor/11).

Once, we observed a boy from Afghanistan writing out his classmates' names in Farsi and explaining to the Polish and Ukrainian students that his heritage language is written in a different alphabet. That sparked a discussion of other

languages – Arabic and Russian – using other than Latin alphabets. A teen Russian boy born in Uzbekistan quickly told the group that during the Soviet era his grandparents wrote Uzbek in Cyrillic but he was using Latin alphabet in his school to write the same language. Witnessing this spontaneous discussion, we wished that Polish teachers facilitated more of such opportunities surrounding their students' heritage languages.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Schools are important to immigrant children and their families. They not only educate children but are also important "mediating institutions," i.e., those institutions standing between the individual in her or his private life and the large institutions of public life (Berger & Neuhaus 2021). They help bridge the gap between each of us and the overarching society that we live in. Schools are also an important socialization agent (Corsaro & Eder 1990), especially if they implement cross-cultural and multilinguistic initiatives (Sznajder 2016). They are particularly important to migrant children and their families (Ryan & Sales 2013). They are often the only institution in the new country introducing migrant families to a new society (Pustułka et al. 2018) and provide a "systemic contact with the new culture" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2001: 3). Lesia, a school-based intercultural assistant, said: "I have learned that school is often the first safe space in a new and unknown world, where children have the opportunity to discover their identity and learn how to live in a new country, and new community." Lesia continued: "Once I read somewhere that schools aim to 'be a bridge' between what was previously 'mine and known' and what 'was unknown,' but is 'now becoming mine' and it still resonates for me" (Lesia/42). For most children with migrant background in countries where schooling is compulsory, such as in Poland, teachers inevitably become the first linguistic and cultural mediators who model for their students the communicator's role in the new language. Teachers often also become the first resilience tutors, i.e., "people with whom a student will establish a relationship based on trust, giving a sense of security and comfort." Such a relationship might be facilitated by the inclusion and appreciation of the students' heritage language competences and the complexities of their linguistic background to enrich classroom discussions and the group's emergent knowledge.

We posit that teachers, especially Polish language teachers, should mediate between their foreign-born students' heritage language and Polish language, emphasizing the importance of both languages to their educational and personal development. Research shows that teachers' good practices create "a long bridge" facilitating participation in the wider society (Gallegos et al. 2023). What might

constitute good or promising practices in the Polish context is perhaps a topic for another article.

In cases where acquisition of different languages is limited by the availability of teachers (e.g., lack of teaching staff or territorial restrictions), a viable solution may be the development of online language courses that make it easier for children with migrant background to learn their heritage language or the language of their choice.

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Zachowanie języka odziedziczonego wśród dzieci z doświadczeniem migracji w Poznaniu i Wrocławiu: Perspektywa emiczna i etyczna

Abstrakt. Dzieci w rodzinach z doświadczeniem migracji często są rozdarte między zachowaniem języka odziedziczonego/ojczystego a nabyciem biegłości w języku kraju, w którym obecnie mieszkają. Znajomość języka społeczeństwa goszczącego pomaga dzieciom odnieść sukces w szkole i później znaleźć dobrą pracę, a umiejętność posługiwania się językiem odziedziczonym ułatwia komunikację w rodzinie. Zdobycie kompetencji w obu językach jednak nie zawsze jest łatwe. Jest to szczególnie skomplikowane w rodzinach wielopokoleniowych i takich, w których rodzice posługują się różnymi językami odziedziczonymi/ojczystymi. W szkołach dynamika jest zróżnicowana w zależności od liczby osób posługujących się poszczególnymi językami. W artykule analizujemy dynamikę w rodzinach i szkołach dzieci, których co najmniej jedno z rodziców urodziło się poza Polską. Pytamy, kto jest odpowiedzialny za umiejętność posługiwania się przez dzieci jednym lub obydwoma językami i analizujemy sposoby integracji i/lub wykluczenia dzieci-migrantów ze względu na język, którym się posługują. Badamy te kwestie w ramach teorii ugruntowanej (*grounded theory*). Dane empiryczne pochodzą z badań etnograficznych prowadzonych w Poznaniu i Wrocławiu z udziałem dzieci migrujących i ich rodzin, nauczycieli i asystentów międzykulturowych.

Słowa kluczowe: międzynarodowa migracja, dzieci migranci, język odziedziczony, nauka języka odziedziczonego, integracja.

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